

Strategy Note

Seed Sovereignty Now and Forever

Part One – The Challenge

Seeds are one of humanity's most fundamental resources. The genetic diversity of plants, animals, and other organisms we use for food and non-food purposes is vital to our well-being. Preserving these resources and selecting for desirable qualities has always been a necessary practice.

Our Biological Heritage is at Risk

More than ever, we face serious threats to our collective ability to effectively manage these genetic resources. Consolidation of seed sources under fewer and fewer large companies threatens the diversity of available varieties on the market and goes in the opposite direction to sustainability, fairness, and innovation. Utility patents on varieties limits the ability of breeders and farmers to save and improve varieties through their own efforts. The disruptively rapid development of new GMOs (eg gene-edited varieties) without adequate risk assessment, safety controls, or traceability threatens the purity of stocks and risks genetic pollution. False or unproven promises of the benefits of gene editing and other new genomic techniques threaten to dupe people into making uninformed choices and accepting potentially unsafe varieties. Consumers overwhelmingly choose non-GMO for these reasons, when they are informed. Despite what proponents may claim about this new wave of GMOs, they are not precise, not proven safe, and not needed.

Preserving and improving our genetic resources is a matter of social and environmental justice.

Fortunately, we do have proven effective and safe methods for improving genetics, such as selection techniques, crossing and classical hybridization, and population breeding. We can expand and improve on these methods. For animals, we likewise have compatible techniques and breeds that we can improve, which respect our human relationship with them as living creatures and not just treating them “machines” that give us a product.

Non-GMO is a critical baseline, but it is not enough. For long-term sustainability we must promote and improve genetics in ways that are compatible with the [Principles of Health, Ecology, Fairness, and Care](#). Strains developed along these lines thrive under organic/agroecological production conditions – systems that protect the environment, respect animals' welfare, are sufficiently productive, and healthier to consume.

We must adopt systems of production and consumption that preserve biodiversity, cease pollution of soils and water, produce high quality foods, reduce waste, and afford decent and healthy livelihoods. We must reduce dependency on a few multinational companies to produce food, or on allow environmental releases of new genomes produced through unregulated and unproven techniques by any party. We have opportunity to revive and improve ancient and under-used varieties to broaden the base of our production systems. Sovereignty over seeds and breeds is an issue of food sovereignty, food security, fairness to our fellow humans, and societal stability and well-being.

Seed Sovereignty – Now & Forever

We need to keep seed and breed varieties in the commons and in farmers' hands. We must keep suitable genetic material available to breeders so that they can continue to develop high-quality varieties for use in organic and truly regenerative and socially equitable systems. We need to enable more breeders and farmers to revive, expand and improve the base of available genetic resources so that we continue to scale up improvements in production.

A Shared Responsibility

It takes all kinds of people and organizations each with their own important role to fulfill this need we all share: breeders, gene banks, seed companies, farmers, processors, brands, traders, retailers, consumers, government agencies, researchers, educators, laboratories, and NGOs. We all have the right to know what we are growing, buying and eating, and a right to choose. A healthy pool of genetic resources is at the foundation of healthy production systems and healthy communities.



Part Two – Solutions

IFOAM – Organics International, the global umbrella for the organic sector, aims to bring like-minded people and organizations around a unified movement that convenes and coalesces an alternative to the mainstream seed and breeding industry. This alternative movement includes several complementary and critical dimensions through which the IFOAM Seeds Platform will:

- Expand a **Global Network** of like-minded parties who can exchange ideas, unify messages, and collaborate using common communications platforms. All like-minded parties are invited to participate regardless of their official status or position with regard to the term “organic.” The main criterion is a commitment to organic principles.
- Partner in a **Common Market Platform** where breeders, seed producers, seed exchange networks, seed companies, farmers, farmers organizations, food processors, traders, brands, and retailers can work interdependently to improve the diversity, quality, and quantity of organically compatible varieties.
- Convene **Policy Advocacy** efforts, related broad-scale messaging and sector mobilization to: (i) regulate and control the use of GMOs and protect and facilitate the thriving of the organic sector; and (ii) enable the development/breeding and market availability of a greater diversity and quantity of high-quality organic seeds.
- Build a **Research, Learning & Succession channel** that: (i) connects researchers, experienced breeders, and new and aspiring breeders and entrepreneurs through internships and mentorship programs to assure that the current and next generation can grow and thrive; (ii) offers training for certification bodies, businesses, and governments in risk assessment, segregation and traceability, and detection methods.

Part Three – Needs & Accountability

The IFOAM Seeds Platform needs a modest budget to coordinate and accelerate this work. The intention is to seed a working model for the platform that can act as a bridge to conduct its work indefinitely by receiving a modest annual income from various sources, including but not limited to a sustaining sponsors circle, providing training services, market partnerships, and project grants. Funders would receive due recognition from the IFOAM Seeds Platform and appreciation of their support and be allowed and encouraged to show that support publicly.

Accountability for all funds used will be provided by the Seeds Platform Secretariat on at least an annual basis, and will address all expenditures and report on key performance indicators (KPIs) set by the Secretariat based on input from the Platform’s participants, donors, and Steering Committee.

Contact

We encourage your interest, inquiry, and discussion of participating in this work and opportunity. Please contact the IFOAM Seeds Platform Secretary, David Gould, at seeds@ifoam.bio to engage further.

Please share this message widely with your networks and personal contacts.